

Participatory Documentation :

The Mayangna Linguists Team of Nicaragua

Elena Benedicto
IELLab, Purdue University

Demetrio Antolín, Modesta Dolores, Gloria Fendly,
Tomasa Gómez, Elizabeth Salomón
Mayangna Yulbarangyang Balna

Ricard Viñas i de Puig, Alyson Eggleston
IELLab, Purdue University

IELLab, Indigenous and Endangered Languages Lab
Purdue University

Participatory Documentation: The Mayangna Linguists Team of Nicaragua.

community-based initiatives

collaborative teams

Participatory Action Research

Mayangna community
URACCAN University
Linguistics Institute IPILC

External community
Purdue University
IELLab

Antolín, Dolores, Fendly, Gómez, Salomón

Benedicto, Viñas, Eggleston

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Participatory Action Research...

Community

Research

Linguistic Training

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Participatory Action Research

... in a nutshell

What is it...

It implies the **ACTIVE** participation of the members of the community.

The members of the community are **AGENTS** in the process of discovery of knowledge (...not 'informants', not 'object-of-study').

Why? What for?...

The (self) **empowerment** of the community of speakers.

A **re-balancing** of the **power** relationships.

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Outline

1. Setting Up the Issue
2. The Basis: A 3-pillar Platform
3. Implementation
4. Consequences Beyond the 'Field'
5. Conclusions

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1. Setting Up the Issue...

Language Community ↔ **Linguistic Research**

Imbalance

Community ...

- Power of decision about ???

Linguist ...

- Outsider
- Member of dominant culture
- Power of decision about 'who', 'how', 'what', ...

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1. Setting Up the Issue...

Language Community ↔ **Linguistic Research**

Linguistic Training

Step 1

Re-balance, re-distribution of Agentivity

Linguist ...

- Insider
- Member of the language community & culture
- Outsider
- Member of dominant culture
- Power of decision about 'who', 'how', 'what', ...

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1. Setting Up the Issue...

Step 2

Flow of Knowledge

Language Community ↔ **Linguistic Research**

Linguistic Training

→ Power of decision about 'who', 'how', 'what', ...

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2. The Basis: A 3-pillar Platform

1. The Basic Principles
 1. Knowledge systems of equal value
 2. An egalitarian relationship
 3. Self-empowerment of the language community
2. The General Goals
 1. To create a local indigenous linguistics team
 2. To develop a Participatory dynamic
 3. To create materials relevant to the community
3. Implementation Mechanisms
 1. A joint decision-making process
 2. A continuous training program
 3. A self-evaluation mechanism

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3. Implementation

- The participants and the location
- The individual goals ...
 - The community's
 - The research component
 - The training component
- ... and 'how' to integrate and articulate them
- Evaluating the implementation

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3. Implementation...

➤ The participants and the location

North and South America

Legend:

- Tawakha
- Panamahika
- Tushika

HONDURAS

NICARAGUA

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3. Implementation...

➤ The participants and the location

Legend:

- Tawakha
- Panamahika
- Tushika

HONDURAS

NICARAGUA

Sumu
Spanish
Miskitu
Kriol
Rama
Garifuna

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3. Implementation...

➤ The individual goals

Community

Research

Linguistic Training

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3. Implementation...

➤ The individual goals ...

Community

Research

Linguistic Training

✓ Actions motivated by the cultural interests of the community.

- Traditional folktales
- Traditional songs
- Oral history (leaders, past heroes, past community events, cultural celebrations and festivities)
- Endogenous technology (construction of *kuring*, of utilitarian and artistic objects).

Training opportunities for community team

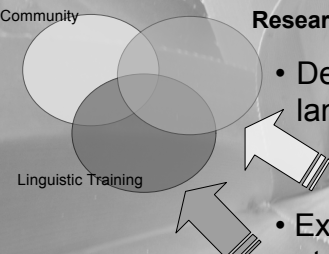
- >> Free spontaneous language data
- >> Targetted spontaneous language data

→ Interviews to women, elders, students...

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3. Implementation...

➤ The individual goals ...




- **Research**
 - Description of the language...
 - ✓ Grammar...
 - ✓ Dictionary...
 - Explanatory analysis of structural properties...
 - ✓ Modal constructions...
 - ✓ Classifier Auxiliaries...

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3. Implementation...

➤ The individual goals...



- **Goal**
 - To create a local, indigenous team of linguists
- **The means**
 - Bachelor's Degrees in EIB, URACCAN (intercultural, bilingual education)
 - Postgraduate courses in linguistics
 - Specific linguistic workshops
 - ✓ on the mechanics of data collection
 - ✓ on the analysis of the data
- **Professional Development**
 - teaching at URACCAN
 - participating in conferences
 - writing research projects
- **Beyond URACCAN**
 - ✓ Back to schools: books, materials
 - ✓ training of teachers (cont. ed.)
 - ✓ high school pool

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3. Implementation...

➤ Integrating all the components...

- Initial meeting
 - Brainstorming
 - >> decision making process
 - Planning
 - Evaluation
- Twice a year workshops ...
 - ...short, intensive
 - Evaluation
 - >> With respect to initial goals
 - >> More awareness, focus
 - Analysis
 - Linguistic training sessions
 - Planning
- Intersession work periods
 - Data collection
 - Preliminary data processing
 - >> Transcription, initial analysis, etc...

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3. Implementation...

➤ Evaluating the approach...

Original Goal

- Linguists ... members of the community
- to rebalance power inequalities

➤ Yes! ...

- ✓ There is a team of indigenous linguists
- ✓ They are participating in key professional positions
- ✓ Increased presence of women

➤ BUT....

- ✓ Different individual goals
 - >> Shifting goals...
 - >> Individuals vs community
- ✓ Power and responsibility...
 - is power rebalanced?
 - In progress...
 - >> control of \$\$
 - >> project writing

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4. Consequences Beyond the 'Field'...

... Some basic questions

- The source of the 'knowledge'
 - Who 'knows'
 - What constitutes 'knowledge'
 - >> The (neo-)colonization of knowledge
- Whose priorities
 - Whose goals have 'priority'
 - How 'knowledge' is 'distributed' or disseminated (publication venues, languages used, etc...)
- Ownership
 - Who 'owns' the language
 - Who 'controls' the language

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4. Consequences Beyond the 'Field'...

... their implications for Research
in western-style institutions

- NSF: 'Broader Impact' section required
Specific programs for EL, with NEH
- Canada's *Social Science and Humanities Research Council*
Strong requirements to work with First Nations languages
Specific programs for FN languages
- LSA, Committee on Endangered Languages
 - K.Rice (editor of *IJAL*), position paper 2004
Ethical Issues in linguistic fieldwork: an overview
 - Ethical research → Advocacy research → Empowering research

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4. Consequences Beyond the 'Field'...

... and implications for Education
in western-style institutions
e.g., in the classroom

- @ Linguistics: Field Methods Class
 - The role of the speaker
 - Undefined...
 - Lack of recognition for the contribution of the speaker
 - The rights of the speaker/community
 - What is it that is being said about my language
 - The right of 'return' ...to know the results of the research
 - The responsibility of the researcher towards the community

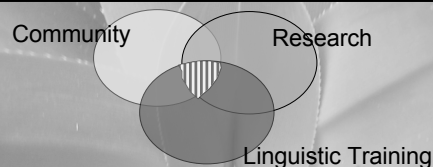
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5. Conclusions



- A collaborative system that tries to ...
 - Articulate the needs of everybody involved
 - Recognize the different 'knowledges' involved
 - Re-balance the power relations involved
- Emphasis on the process
- Work in progress...
 - Some successes and ... More to do!

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